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THE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM.

BY HORACE WHITE.

IN a reply to questions addressed to me by the editor of the *World* some months ago, I said that I could see no need of a School of Journalism. I am, nevertheless, glad that Columbia University has been supplied with the means to establish one. This is not intended as a paradox. Columbia already has the plant and the teaching force for the training of journalists in so far as they can be trained otherwise than by practice; but both the plant and the teaching force are susceptible of improvement. There is no danger that they will be overloaded by the addition of one or two million dollars to the existing resources. If the authorities of Columbia are fit for their places, general culture will receive an impulse from Mr. Pulitzer's donation, and journalism will share therein.

It is quite probable, too, that the existence of this fund, and the stir that it makes in the country, will draw to Columbia more than her usual share of young men who seek to become journalists. Although Harvard or Yale, without a School of Journalism, might conceivably be better equipped to train men for editorial work than Columbia with one, yet the average boy would expect to get from the latter more of the kind of instruction that he wants than from either of the former. Then Columbia, feeling an impulse in this direction, would, no doubt, be spurred to fresh exertions in her departments of political and social science, and whatever else she might regard as most helpful to the editorial mind; and that would be a gain to general culture, including journalism.

I maintain, however, that the university has nothing to teach journalists in the special sense that it has to teach lawyers, physicians, architects and engineers. It can teach the *technique*

of those professions. It cannot teach the *technique* of journalism, except by publishing a newspaper in competition with other newspapers in the same town. If it should attempt to do so, Mr. Pulitzer's money would probably be spent in less time than he took to earn it.

The art of English composition is taught in all universities, colleges, and high schools with more or less success. The desideratum here is not a school of journalism, but a good teacher. After the intending journalist has obtained as much proficiency in writing good English as he can acquire without practice under the goad of the printer's devil, his technical requirements are—what? First of all, a “nose for news.” In this phrase are included the recognition, the valuation, the collection and arrangement of news. Every experienced journalist will agree that a nose for news cannot be cultivated at college. Some other kinds of noses may be, but the one which perceives immediately what kind of news the public is most eager to read, and knows offhand how to get it and present it in an attractive way—that is something which can be trained only in a newspaper office. There are differences of scent between trained newspaper men as marked as between different breeds of dogs, and the demand for journalists who are both highly gifted and highly trained in this particular, is great and increasing; but such men have never been made at college, and never will be.

What are the other technicalities of journalism? I can think of none except phonography, typewriting, and proof-reading. I have never met an editor-in-chief who was a shorthand writer. My colleague, Edwin L. Godkin, used a typewriter in the composition of editorials in his later years, but he learned the art at his own home in his leisure hours. Anybody can learn the technical part of proof-reading in two hours, although practice is needed to acquire rapidity and accuracy. Columbia would no more think of embracing these things in her curriculum than she would of establishing a chair of head-lines, a chair of interviews, or a chair of “scoops.”

In their academic departments, all the colleges and universities of the country are schools of journalism, some having larger and better equipment for this task than others, just as some have larger libraries and laboratories than others. They are all supplying, in greater or less measure, the training that young men

need to improve their keenness and breadth of vision, and to enable them to judge of the value of evidence (which J. S. Mill considered the chief object of education), and to express their thoughts in good English. It is not a new kind of training that Columbia will introduce in her School of Journalism, but a betterment of the kind she already gives. She could do nothing different even if Mr. Pulitzer's gift were ten times as great as it is. The fundamentals of journalism are those which we have in mind when we say that Mr. So-and-So is a gentleman and a scholar; and it is only fundamentals which the university can supply.

Of course, some ways of using the money will be better than others, and here, perhaps, a leaf out of my own experience may be useful. I entered journalism in 1854. I had received the college education in vogue at that time. It included Latin and Greek, in which I was fairly well grounded, and which I have always found useful. It did not include English. At that time English was supposed to be born, not made. This was the opinion of educators in Columbia as well as in Beloit. No college at that time gave courses in English, so far as I can discover. This was a serious defect, but it was supplemented in my case by incessant drilling in the Old and New Testaments, administered as religious, not as literary, exercises, and even more at home and in Sunday-school than in the college. It was well for me that I had this training, for I consider the English Bible the best instrument for instruction in the English tongue that exists to-day, and the best guide to the acquirement of good style of composition; yet it did not make up for the lack of Shakespeare, Milton, Burke, Goldsmith and the other English classics. It did not supply the place of a good teacher of English rhetoric and literature. Columbia is well equipped in this department, and all I need say further under this head is that it should constitute the groundwork of a journalist's training.

The next serious defect in my early education was a want of acquaintance with the science of law. I gained some notions of Roman law from Cicero's orations and moral works, but only incidentally. The only law book that entered into my curriculum was Story on the Constitution. This was good as far as it went, but it was not the bed-rock that I needed. I found myself much hampered by ignorance of the English common law, which I

sought to repair by reading Kent's Commentaries, in the intervals of daily journalistic work. I thus came to know where to look for further instruction in special branches of law, as occasion required. I should recommend as an important part of a journalist's training, not only the doses of Roman law, constitutional law and international law which all universities now supply, but also a good draught of English common law.

I was well grounded in political economy (as the science then existed) by President Chapin of Beloit, himself a keen thinker and clear writer on that subject. What I acquired in college, however, was a due appreciation of economics as part of an editor's furnishings, rather than multifarious cramming. The only books I saw in college were those of Wayland and J. B. Say, the former as a text-book, the latter for private reading; but very little has appeared in books or magazines since that time that I have not mastered, or tested by sample. This I have found necessary in order to give advice to my readers on the numberless problems, of an economic sort, that are constantly arising in public affairs. Columbia is strong on the economic side and will doubtless so continue.

Neither political science nor history was taught in my college years. Greek and Roman history I had in abundance as part of my classical training; but modern history we were supposed to acquire, as we acquired English literature, by induced currents rather than direct contact. Neither sociology nor psychology existed then, although phrenology and mesmerism were much in evidence. Since my graduation, a whole troop of sciences have pushed forward which may justly claim a place in the young journalist's curriculum; and here is room for sound judgment, and discrimination on the part of Columbia's committee on organization. Their aim should be to make a gentleman and a scholar in every case, and leave him to learn journalism afterwards by practice.

How to produce the scholar for journalism has been sufficiently indicated. How to produce the gentleman is something different and not always attainable. The formation of character begins earlier than college life, but continues through it and long after. It does not end while life lasts. American colleges and universities without exception do aim to give their students correct moral, as well as intellectual, training. They do strive to make them

good citizens. Now, the high-minded man and good citizen will be such in all times and places, whatever be his walk in life. The same rules will govern him in the editorial chair, or at the reporter's desk, that would govern him in the pulpit or in the counting-room. Lectureships have been established in some institutions lately on the duties of the citizen. These are to be commended, but they apply to all trades and professions as fully as to journalism.

The question arises at this point, why are there so many black sheep in journalism? Why so many "fakes"? Why is the epidemic of "yellow journalism" so prevalent? This phrase is applied to newspapers which delight in sensations, crime, scandal, smut, funny pictures, caricatures and malicious or frivolous gossip about persons and things of no public concern. When I entered journalism, the press of the country, with only one exception that I can now recall, was clean, dignified and sober-minded. It had various aims in life, aims political, literary, scientific, social, religious, reformatory and mixed, which were deemed by the conductors of the papers advantageous to the common weal. To make money by pandering to the vices and follies of the community, and thus adding to the mass of vice and folly, was generally unthinkable.

The yellow journalist, when somebody remonstrates against his practices, says that the fault lies with the public taste; that he merely gives the people what they want. This means that he has made experiments on the public appetite, and has found that he can get more dollars by spreading folly and foulness through the community than by publishing decent news in a decent way. In like manner, others have found that they can make more money by keeping pool rooms and disorderly houses than by following the plough or sawing wood. Yet when we have said this—when we have heaped anathemas on the head of the yellow journalist—we have not advanced an inch toward betterment. We stand confronted with the fact that it pays to publish this kind of newspaper, and that, as long as it pays, this kind of newspaper will be published. I once believed that people would soon tire of such vulgarity and nonsense, and that yellow journalism would cease for want of a market, but I confess that I do not yet see any natural law in operation to check its desolating career. On the other hand, I do see that the public takes less interest in thought-

ful discussions of serious questions in the press than it did when I first entered the profession. The reason is that it gets less of it. Mental activity grows by what it feeds on. If the thinking faculty is not kept in practice, it falls into noxious desuetude.

The vice which consists in making newspapers marketable rather than good is not wholly confined to the yellow journals. It is found in a tendency to eschew "heaviness" of all kinds; to avoid articles which require thought to produce and to appreciate; and especially to steer clear of all blizzards and fog-banks of public opinion which might temporarily chill the circulation. This spirit is found in very respectable newspapers. Their aim is to be light, breezy and picturesque, perhaps grotesque, and to give offence to nobody. "Modern journalism," says Mr. E. L. Shuman in an acute and valuable work,* "has higher rewards for those who can amuse than for those whose main object is to instruct." The bad rich press and the timid rich press are like King Stork and King Log to the frog community. In saying this I do not lose sight of some fine examples of the independent press, which still flourish; but I affirm that the press of fifty years ago was, as a whole, stronger intellectually, more influential and more respected than the press is now, although, in the mere matter of news-gathering, it was as inferior to the press of to-day as a blacksmith's forge is to the Carnegie steel works.

I chanced the other day to pick up the "Recollections" of the actor Stoddart, containing an Introduction by William Winter, who says therein that "in acting, as well as in literature, fine and substantial things—things having in them the grandeur of noble truth and the fire of genial passion—were more frequent forty or fifty years ago than they are now. The actor of the old school," he continues, "was an actor thoroughly grounded in his profession, trained by experience, equipped at all points, able to do many things well and some things brilliantly, and, whatever may have been his defects, solid and stable in character, moderate in self-confidence and usually modest in the conduct of life." I agree with Mr. Winter in this. The editor and the actor of half a century ago were keyed to the same pitch, and I cannot help asking myself whether the decadence of the press has not had something to do with the decadence of the stage. The people take the kind of newspaper that is given to them, and nine-tenths of

* "Practical Journalism," by E. L. Shuman, New York, 1903.

them are unconsciously cast in its mould. If it is mentally enervating and silly, they will be so; if it is yellow, they will reflect the same hue.

The sum and substance of my theme is, that yellow journalism exists because it pays and that it pays because it exists. How to disable this machine of perpetual motion is the greatest problem that confronts our social philosophers. It exceeds in importance the Philippine question, or the race question, or the municipal government question. It includes all these and much more. I have seen the American people recover their balance in many fearful crises, when they seemed on the point of toppling over; but I can imagine one in which the Republic might receive great detriment without the people knowing what hurt them, or even knowing that they were hurt. If such a calamity comes it will come through bad journalism, not a subsidized press but a brain-softening press, such as we have now in large and growing measure.

"It is well to remember," says Mr. Shuman, "that the editorial department is dwindling, while the great currents of life that sweep nightly through the reportorial departments are increasing yearly." It is a fact that good political writers are scarcer now than they were fifty years ago. It is harder to obtain them now than then, harder now than at any other time in my experience. The colleges are sending out larger numbers of graduates and more highly-trained ones, yet the number seeking positions as editorial writers, and qualified, or showing aptitude, therefor is smaller than it has ever been in my time. There must be a reason for this. Among the drolleries of the day I saw not long ago a question and answer like the following: "Why are good cooks and waitresses so scarce?" "Because they are engaged in writing stories for the magazines. It pays better."

In all branches of personal service, demand and supply usually keep in close touch with each other, and this is especially true of intellectual service. If the supply of good editorial writers has fallen off, it must be because the demand has fallen off, and this, I believe, is the truth. I mean the kind of demand that calls into being an effective and regular supply. No self-respecting youth will prepare himself for future connection with a yellow journal; and, in general, the number who will prepare for newspaper work will be governed by the aspect in which journalism daily presents itself to their eyes. What are the most prominent

features of journalism to-day? They are pictures, head-lines, color scheme, job type, sports, gossip. Is it any wonder that the bright young men, those who feel "growing pains" for high achievement and growing hope for distinction therein, are repelled from a profession which presents itself to them in such harlequin garb? But that is not all. In order that there may be a steady supply of good editorial writers, there must be both a congenial field for them to work in and a sufficient fund to pay them. But the money formerly destined for the editorial writer now goes to the cartoonist, the artist reporter, and the color schemer. Does any one ask why good editorial writers are so scarce nowadays? May they not be employed as waiters at hotels and restaurants, finding the occupation there more congenial and the pay more regular?

To make good journalists is not difficult. The raw material abounds and the tools are not deficient. But to do noble work of preparation they must see a field of labor worthy of noble minds. Show them an arena where the highest merit will win the highest prize, as in law, medicine and engineering, and the arena will soon be vocal with the *gaudium certaminis*.

HORACE WHITE.